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AUTHOR	Collins, Timothy
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ABSTRACT

This paper lays out a rationale for building local rural development policies that focus on potential strengths of school-community relationships, while empowering local citizens. Rural communities and their schools are caught up in trends that complicate policy at all levels. These trends include changes related to national and global economic restructuring, devolution of government, and systemic education reform based on higher standards and accountability. The rural school-community relationship is crucial to community sustainability. In rural communities buffeted by changes that have depleted capital, tax bases, institutional resources, and population, schools may be one of the few remaining vital institutional forces. Despite the perils and problems, the confluence of economic restructuring, government devolution, and systemic school reform offers schools and communities an opportunity to form new relationships based on their mutual dependency, the promise of improved quality of life, democratic ideals and practices, and the urgency of community survival. Rural school officials and community leaders must cooperate in formulating holistic community-development policies that address local needs, include diverse citizen participation, and build community capacity to enhance democratic processes. School governance is already changing, as efforts to increase accountability demand meaningful community engagement. In their role as a local institution, schools must also become community centers that engage the whole community in their operating decisions, services, and programs. Conversely, rural communities must use schools as democratizing institutions that train adaptable citizens and workers to sustain community life in an uncertain future. (Contains 41 references.) (SV)

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Crucial Policy Links: Rural School Reform, Community Development, and Citizen Empowerment

By Timothy Collins
Director, ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools
Senior Rural Education Specialist
AEL, Inc.
P.O. Box 1348
Charleston, WV 25325-1348
304-347-0419

Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Rural Sociological Society, Chicago, IL, August 4-8, 1999.

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ABSTRACT

Crucial Policy Links: Rural School Reform, Community Development, and Citizen Empowerment
By Timothy Collins
Director, ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools
Senior Rural Education Researcher
AEL, Inc.
P.O. Box 1348
Charleston, WV 25325-1348
304-347-0419
collinst@ael.org

The purpose of this paper is to lay out a rationale for the importance of building local rural economic- and community-development policies that focus on potential strengths of school-community relationships, while empowering local citizens. Rural communities and their schools are caught up in numerous trends that complicate policy at the local, state, and national levels, including: (1) Many rural communities have suffered from changes related to national and global economic restructuring. (2) Devolution of government has increased pressure on states and local communities to deal with their own problems, raising questions of equity and local social capacity to deal with these pressures. (3) Systemic education reform, based on higher standards and stricter accountability, has put many rural schools at the brink of a historic moment that challenges their survival. Many rural education researchers work from a premise that the relationship between rural communities and their schools is crucial to community sustainability. In rural communities buffeted by changes that have depleted capital, tax bases, and government and other institutional resources, as well as the population base, schools may be one of the few remaining vital institutional forces. The fluidity of global change and government devolution is perilous for many rural communities and poses problems for policy makers at all levels of government. But the confluence of economic restructuring, government devolution, and the challenges of systemic school reform offers schools and communities an opportunity to form new relationships based on their mutual dependency, the promise of improved quality of life, democratic ideals and practices, and the urgency of community survival. Forming these new relationships will require rural school officials and community leaders to cooperate in formulating holistic community-development policies that address local needs and include citizen participation that bridges race, ethnicity, and class. In so doing, these policies will have to form and reform community capacity of both institutions and individuals to enhance democratic processes. School governance is already changing; some systemic reform efforts try to increase school accountability by demanding meaningful community engagement. Some rural schools are changing their policies and

building on their strengths as core community institutions that embrace all facets of community life and empower local residents to have a guiding hand in their future. Thus, accountability to the public for academic performance is only one aspect of schools as a local institution; schools also need to become community centers that engage students, parents, and the general public in their operating decisions, services, and programs. Conversely, if rural communities are to survive in a changing global economy and government devolution, localities need to develop policies that use schools as democratizing institutions that train adaptable citizens, workers, and business owners who can sustain community life in an uncertain future.

Crucial Policy Links:
Rural School Reform, Community Development, and Citizen Empowerment

By Timothy Collins

The key to most of the educational problems of the country is the country school. There is scarcely a single phase of country life in which the country school may not become a vitalizing factor. The boys' and girls' clubs should begin there. The study of farm production, of marketing, of sources of supply, of farm accounts, and of road and telephone construction should be a part of the work of the country school. But this work should be extended over the social interests of the community also. The knowledge of one's environment should include one's economic and social as well as one's physical environment (Carver, 1915:127).

. . . [T]he country child has as much right as the city child to a training which will enable him to live in the world in which he finds himself and understand his share in it, and to get a good start in adapting himself to it. It is the business of every school to train its pupils to be successful as human beings and as American citizens. To do this it must take into account and make use of the conditions around it—the interests, the needs, and the occupations of the families of its pupils. This does not mean that our rural schools shall be a copy of the city schools, but that there shall be set up in every rural community a school which will base its work upon the life of the community and the needs of the community, so that its pupils shall receive the necessary training that will enable them to fit successfully into the life of the community (Dille, 1920:291-292).

A rural school whose program is closely geared to the community's needs and problems is peculiarly well situated to teach the wise use of natural resources. Its philosophy requires an accurate knowledge of the community's needs. Its curriculum and schedule are so flexible that children can take advantage of valuable learning experiences. It has a high quality of leadership that helps people of the community to cope with their problems *(Conservation Education in American Schools,* 1951).

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to lay out a rationale for the importance of building local rural economic- and community-development policies that focus on potential strengths of school-community relationships, while empowering local citizens. One underlying premise is that while it is impossible for rural communities to alter global changes, they can have broad-based local discussions, develop agreed-upon policies, and pursue activities that may help enhance their chances of sustainability. Another underlying premise is that the relationship between rural communities and their schools is crucial to community sustainability.

Rural communities and their schools are caught up in numerous trends that complicate policy at the local, state, and national levels, including:

1. Many rural communities have suffered from changes related to national and global economic restructuring.
2. Government devolution has increased pressure on states and local communities to deal with their own problems, raising questions of equity and local social capacity to deal with these pressures.
3. Systemic education reform, based on higher standards and stricter accountability, has put many rural schools at the brink of a historic moment that challenges their survival.

In rural communities buffeted by changes that have depleted capital, tax bases, and government and other institutional

resources, as well as the population base, schools may be one of the few remaining vital institutional forces. The fluidity of global change and government devolution is perilous for many rural communities and poses problems for policy makers at all levels of government. But the confluence of economic restructuring, government devolution, and systemic school reform offers schools and communities an opportunity to form new and renewed relationships.

My presentation today has nothing to do with nostalgic views of a rural past that was a golden era of peace, virtue, and prosperity. Yet, the **ideals** of that rural past serve as a reference point for building and rebuilding rural schools and communities. The ideals of rural education include small classes, personalized instruction, strong relationships, cooperative learning, parent and community involvement—a focus on the whole child (AEL, 1998). The ideals of rural communities include high quality of life, democratic ideals and practices, and personal relationships.

Some of the excitement about rural schools and their communities lies in these ideals. Yet, the rural past was as full of doubt, strife, and ambiguity as the rural present. The difference is the future, which, despite all of the contradictory trends of globalization, devolution, and efforts at community building, offers promises yet to be fulfilled (cf. AEL, 1998). If there is any chance of fulfilling these promises, there must be a favorable policy climate, and citizens of rural communities must

choose to work together to take advantage of opportunities in the midst of all of the uncertainty.

The future will require building on ideals, while modifying patterns of social relationships. The policy direction I suggest will require rural school officials and community leaders to cooperate in formulating holistic school- and community-development policies. These policies should be formed with encouragement from state and federal government. While under state auspices, they must be played out at the local level, addressing local needs and including citizen participation that bridges race, ethnicity, and class relationships. In so doing, these policies must form and reform community capacity of both institutions and individuals to enhance democratic processes and empower all citizens.

Literature Review

In this literature review, I'd like to briefly discuss how devolution has affected schools and then outline some ideas on school-community relationships.

School Reform and Devolution

The "modern" federal policy impetus for public involvement in education stems partly from the War on Poverty. The Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 required that the poor participate in making decisions about using federal funds in local schools. In

fact, the federal programs sought to implement in urban areas processes perceived to be operating in rural areas (Havighurst, 1979).

At the state level, there also was a wave of devolution in the 1960s and 1970s. According to David (1989), the managerial strategy of decentralization or school-site budgeting was adopted to give political power to local communities, increase administrative efficiency, or offset state authority.

By the late 1980s, devolution was more evident in state-level school policies. As David (1989) points out, school-based management rapidly became the centerpiece of reforms. "School restructuring" that increased autonomy could be found in the diverse recommendations of the National Governors' Association, both national teachers' unions, and corporate leaders. The purpose of this wave of change was different from the 1960s. It was intended to foster innovation, improved academic achievement, and continuous professional development in order to meet higher academic standards. This devolution appears to parallel business management practices, with little research to back the change (cf. Bailey, 1991).

The "democratization" of schools through devolution was intended to increase accountability, but as Blase and Anderson (1995) note, examples of democratic, empowering leadership are hard to find. There are numerous obstacles to community engagement (AEL, forthcoming; Collins, 1998), listed in Table 1.

Table 1: Real and Perceived Obstacles to School-Community interactions.

Systemic

Inside school system	**Outside school system**
Intimidating, complex system	High poverty levels
Legal, bureaucratic control of institution, ownership of planning processes	Democratic impulses, community solidarity stifled
School politics	Lack of employment opportunities; loss of students through out-migration once educated
Clashing values	High illiteracy rates, low education levels
Social diversity a challenge	No education tradition or clear agreement on it
Economy of "one best way" of doing tasks	Class, racial, and ethnic distance
Economy, politics of inertia, *status quo*	Rural/neighborhood geography, distance
Ivory tower mentality—physical and institutional distance from community, businesses, agencies	Lack of business, local government, or community support

Personal

School staff	**Citizens**
Blocks participation	Don't value education or community
Professional distance	Bad experiences in school
Professional vocabulary	Intimidated by staff, size of building
Fear of empowered community, sharing of leadership	Don't feel ownership
Fear of sharing school performance data	Rumors, misinformation, may not understand data
Fear of change	Fear of change
Too many responsibilities already	Too busy with work, other family obligations
Lack of expertise in working with public	Lack of technical expertise
Fear of disagreements, challenges to power	Fear of disagreements, challenging people in power
Personality clashes with outside leaders, citizens	Personality clashes with school leaders
Not in job description	Bad school experiences

Adapted from AEL (forthcoming); Collins (1998)

Obstacles to school-community interaction may be present in varying degrees in different rural communities. In this schema, obstacles are divided into four categories: systemic-inside and outside the school system-and personal-school staff and citizens. Systemic obstacles are flaws (perceived and real) related to the organization of the school or the larger society. They may be difficult or impossible to change, especially if they are legal obstacles. Personal obstacles are a different matter. They may be easier to change than systemic obstacles, if the individuals are willing to change.

School officials may be able to deal directly with school system and personal obstacles related to administration, faculty, and staff. But they can only mitigate the effects of systemic obstacles outside the school and personal obstacles related to parents and other citizens. If obstacles outside the school are significant in a particular locality, then administrators will be in a difficult position. This table suggests that the school's problems are the community's problems and the community's problems are the school's problems.

School-Community Relationships

Historically, rural education reform has been a difficult proposition based on rural-urban antagonisms, uneven economic development, and social inequality. Tompkins (1977) notes many rural residents resisted state efforts to reform schools; reform was seen to come at the expense of local control and stemmed from

the urban orientation of policy makers in the state capital. Nor did rural citizens like the results of consolidation, urban schools, and education models. According to Sher and Tompkins (1977), consolidators told rural residents these resources would increase learning and therefore success of their children. The promise was for new buildings, sophisticated equipment, and more course offerings. Progress and consolidation, however, stood against long-standing values of local control, close relationships, small-scale organization, and opportunities for student participation in school activities.

The diversity of rural America poses another obstacle. No school reform model can be "one size fits all." It is crucial to consider the various cultural, economic, and political circumstances of rural communities. Many rural communities hesitate to engage in reform because the expenditures result in increased out-migration of talented youth who end up in cities and suburbs (Stern, 1994).

While rural schools have been, historically, a focal point for the community, rapid changes in many communities, coupled with pressures for reform, heighten the urgency of looking for new roles for the school. Traditional views of education, however, may stand in the way of considering new possibilities. The existing values of community involvement, however, are an asset on which to build (Miller and Hahn, 1997).

Hodgkinson (1991:16) believes school restructuring is really a two-part question: "What can educators do that they are

not already doing . . . to get [children] achieving well in a school setting? And how can educators collaborate more closely with other service providers so that we all work together toward the urgent goal of providing services to the same client?" The key to answering these questions lies in how society members define "we." As Guthrie and Guthrie (1991) point out, the challenge is not to divide up responsibilities, but to reconceptualize the role of the school and relationships among the school, the family, the community, and the larger society.

Fullan (1993) writes that there is a need for partnerships, and no reasonable case can be made for the continued isolation of schools. Marburger (1989) cites the following reasons for decentralizing power to the school level:

- Lack of faith in big government and big institutions based on their inability to help individuals.
- Loss of faith in the way schools are run.
- Schools as a virtual monopoly.

These, are, however, negative reasons for school reform that have caused many educators to continue to resist change. Devolution also offers the positive possibility of more democratic participation in schools. As Cortes (1996:26) writes:

> I believe that it is important to understand that "public engagement" is not mobilization around fears and frustrations. Nor is it another easily-applied formula for education reform. Meaningful community engagement is a long-term process requiring a patient investment of sustained effort. Rather than being included as just one part of a strategy to improve public education, community engagement should be at the center of the effort. It is not a question of

> bridging the gap between the "leadership" and the community: it's a matter of making the community the leadership in educational reform.

Given the importance of rural schools to their communities, coupled with an increasingly interconnected world, the mission of schools is changing. First, rural students must be prepared to work and live either in rural small towns or beyond (AEL, 1998). Sher (1977) was probably the first person in a generation to suggest that rural schools play a crucial role in the economic development of their communities (cf. Howley and Eckman, 1997).[1] Miller and Hahn (1997) provide case studies of three rural communities that have engaged students in community and economic development.

Second, rural schools, as a central institution in rural life, have an important role to play in community economic development and sustainability. Haas and Nachtigal (1998) suggest students need to learn to live well, incorporating knowledge of the ecology, civic involvement, economics, sense of spiritual connection, and community living. Their core assumption is that schools are intended to serve the public and to help students live well in their communities; the function of schools is to

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[1] University of Kentucky rural sociologist Howard Beers noted in 1943 that as a result of out-migration, rural community schools needed a broader objective, educating children "for life as adults in world community" (Beers, 1943, p. 81-82). The problem, according to Beers, was that children were not *educated* into the community, but instead were *worked* into the community. A worker's decision to stay or go depended partly on the availability of work, but education also induced rural-urban migration. The clear connection Beers made between education and community economic development forms a historic understanding for the need for schools to become involved in economic development and service learning.

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pass knowledge across generations while building the community for the future.

Third, global economic change has buffeted many communities, causing out-migration of people, services, businesses, and institutions; falling wages; and deterioration of socioeconomic conditions (cf. Nord, 1999; Gibbs, Swaim, and Teixeira, 1998). Rural schools may be threatened not only by meeting the demands for accountability and higher standards, but also by erosion of the surrounding community. This condition amplifies the importance of developing policies to help link rural schools to community economic development (AEL, forthcoming).

What role can schools play in rural community economic development? Miller (1995) lays out three interrelated models that are mutually beneficial to the school and the community:

1) the school as community center, a lifelong learning center, and a vehicle for delivering numerous services;
2) community as curriculum, emphasizing the community in all of its complexities as part of students' learning activities in the classroom;
3) the school as a developer of entrepreneurial skills.

Miller (1995) notes that the long-term benefits of these school-community partnerships may include leadership development, renewed civic responsibility, and a revitalized sense of community. These are crucial elements of social infrastructure development. Stern (1994) suggests the need to redesign rural

education in order to create opportunities for rural youth in their communities. She notes school curricula linked to community development have integrated students into community life in a significant way, thus changing their attitudes. These programs have helped students see that the community is a possible place to stay or return to after college.

Traditionally, schools have prepared students for citizenship and to be productive workers. Rural schools have been an important part of the community in many ways, but too often they have educated students so they could go to work elsewhere. In addition, schools have distanced themselves from parents in the community because of professionalism. Also, learning has occurred in the classroom, with limited attention to community resources. This suggests schools need to take an active role in strategic planning and economic development **in the community**. This notion is built on sharing limited resources to enhance the likelihood of school and community sustainability. The idea is to link the school more closely with the community, sharing resources for building local leadership, employment opportunities, professional development, and a community of learners. Technology becomes a link for the school and community to interact within itself and with people in other communities around the world.

Theoretical Perspective

In this section, I'd like to maintain faithfulness to the Gramscian school by recognizing the importance of the economic base, but allowing for individual and community agency that allows for alternatives to emerge in both ideology and in everyday social interactions. Some of the recent literature on community is helpful, and Giddens (1994) offers some concepts that suggest why rural communities and schools may be able to use devolutionary trends to build local policies to help weather the negative impacts of globalization.

Coleman (1988) believes social capital to be a productive resource in a community. Swanson (1991) reconceptualizes social capital, terming it social infrastructure. He suggests that when social infrastructure is unconstrained, it can enhance community development efforts. A community's ability to act to achieve collective goals is termed "community agency" and is a product of the social infrastructure in a community. As Collins and Dewees [forthcoming] point out, community development is dependent on developing social capital or social infrastructure that may be inhibited by local power structures. Even in rural communities where social infrastructure is inhibited, there may well be considerable untapped social infrastructure with diverse talents and energies.

The concepts of social capital and social infrastructure suggest that particular community social relationships can affect economic outcomes in significant ways. In community economic

development, the ability of the community to recognize opportunities, make choices, and act on these choices may enhance the productivity of local resources and ultimately effect local development outcomes. The community's ability to recognize opportunities and act on them is related to the qualities of local social interaction, including the level of trust in a local community, local norms of information sharing, reciprocity, and cooperation, and finally the willingness to act cooperatively (cf. Portes and Sensenbrenner, 1993).

For rural communities, however, there are limits on what they can do in a world where much that happens is outside of their control. Yet, there are opportunities in the midst of the uncertainties. Giddens (1994:4-7) notes the major changes our world is undergoing. First, he defines globalization as "action at a distance," noting that it is a "complex mixture of processes" that are contradictory, a source of conflicts and challenges to unity, and a source of new forms of social stratification. Second, he discusses the emergence of the "post-traditional social order." Traditions do not disappear, but are subject to questioning and discourse. Third, Giddens discusses the notion of expanded "social reflexivity," in which individuals must filter information, interpret it, and act upon it in the wider world. Experts no longer have a lock on knowledge, giving individuals "greater autonomy of action." The post-traditional world also makes bureaucracies obsolete.

With these problems, Giddens suggests it may be difficult to regenerate community for three reasons:

1) Civil society as we've known it depends on a centralized state, which has been detraditionalized through devolution.
2) A renewed civil society under current conditions could be dangerous rather than emancipatory because of the risk of fundamentalism (cf. Davidson, 1991).
3) While many see renewal of civil society as important to renewing democracy, there is a possible tension between democratization and civil society because of liberalism's abstract, universal rights for individuals do not facilitate community building.

Giddens (1994:10-17) suggests a framework for reconstituting politics. Some of this framework is relevant to developing rural schools and communities, including:

1) Reconciling individuals' autonomy and interdependence in various spheres of social life to enhance solidarity through "active trust" tied to personal and social responsibility.
2) Recognition of "life politics," which means that we recognize that individual and social struggles occur in a world that is now more subject to our decisions than being fixed by nature or tradition. We have increased social reflexivity, and schools can play an important role in developing it.
3) There is a need to develop a "generative politics" which allows individuals and groups to "make things happen" instead of waiting for things to happen. The hope is that politics can

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more effectively approach problems of poverty and social exclusion, thus building "active trust" in the community.

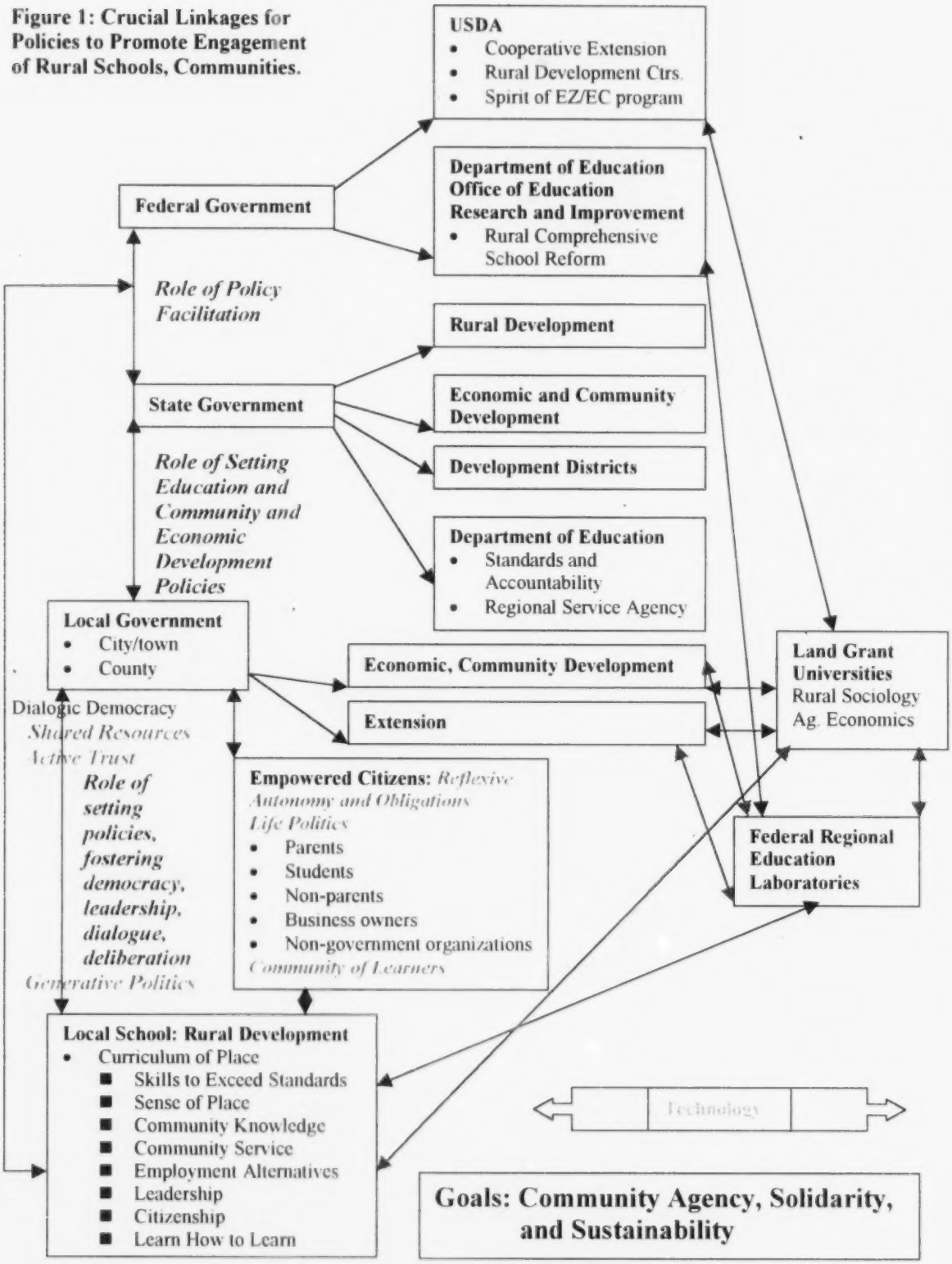
4) "Dialogic democracy" could open the way for solving problems in public arenas through broad-based discussion by various groups, rather than through an elite wielding power.

The linkages of these four concepts, according to Giddens (1994:127) are trust, obligation, and solidarity. As suggested in the literature review on community, others also view these kinds of linkages as important. Matthews (1999) adds the notion of teaching communities the process of deliberation. In this sense, conversations have two intertwining elements: Deliberation is defined as "meaning making," while dialogue is defined as "decision making." People need to understand why events are significant so they can decide how to act.

Crucial Policy Linkages

Figure 1 suggests that various agencies, groups, and individuals at various levels might be brought together to assist schools and communities in working and acting together for rural community development. The focus is on the community, which works in concert with various state and federal agencies. In the best of all possible worlds, the community is the locus of generative politics based on active trust, obligation, and solidarity for promoting community agency and sustainable development. It is here that citizens hold their deliberations and dialogue on important issues related to rural school and community

Figure 1: Crucial Linkages for Policies to Promote Engagement of Rural Schools, Communities.



sustainability. Federal policies should facilitate local and state efforts to improve schools and communities.

Both the school and local government have the role of setting policies and fostering dialogic democracy, social reflexivity, leadership, and deliberation to empower citizens. For example, these activities might be held in the spirit of the strategic planning process suggested for the Empowerment Zone/Enterprise Community program (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 1994; see Appendix). To be successful, the process of school-community engagement must be inclusive, crossing class, racial, and ethnic lines (AEL, [forthcoming]).

The state has the constitutional mandate for maintaining an education system that meets the needs of all citizens. Besides curriculum and standards of academic achievement, the state also is responsible for governance and finance. While the realities of the political economy may make it difficult to eliminate all educational inequalities, the state can commit itself to a long-run effort to improve conditions in schools by mandating local changes designed to increase academic achievement, good governance, accountability and citizen participation (Collins, 1995).

Figure 1 also suggests the potential for new or expanded relationships between Land Grant Universities and rural schools, and between Land Grant Universities and Federal Regional

Education Laboratories. Extension and the four regional rural development centers could play a role in these linkages.

The U.S. Department of Education is working on a Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) program with funds specially designated for poor rural areas. CSR models are expected to have a community participation component. Use of a community-based curriculum can provide an ideal bridge between the classroom and community development. Part of the idea is for the community to adopt a "culture of education" that helps students and adults become lifelong learners, with the school providing a focal point for those activities. Student learning is not limited to what goes on inside the classroom, but extends out into the community, including ecology, economic and civic involvement, spirituality, and living well in the community (Haas and Nachtigal, 1998). It is important to develop business sense among students so that they can prosper in the community as business owners, a new segment of a revitalized middle class that supports lifelong community education and development, while building sustainable economic diversity.

This idea is feasible, and is already being accomplished in a number of areas by the Rural Challenge, soon to be known as the Rural School and Community Trust (Scott, 1999). Schools tend to be the largest employers in rural areas and have the best facilities for focusing learning energies. While rural schools may be a major repository of learning resources, they are not the sole repository. Residents of rural communities have considerable

expertise on living and working in rural areas, adapting to changing times, and on how life in the community has changed over the years. It appears both the school and the community gain considerably from leveraging resources. The Rural Challenge (Scott, 1999) has begun to document success stories from five years of work in communities across the U.S.

As AEL ([forthcoming]) points out, rural schools and communities have much to gain in the long run from engaging one another and sharing resources:

For the School:

- establish expectations across the community for high levels of academic performance from all students.
- develop a more rigorous and relevant curriculum and teaching practices that allow students to learn challenging subject matter through real-life roles and situations in their community.
- develop a curriculum that emphasizes reasoning, problem solving, and understanding over simply memorizing facts, terms, and formulas.
- create opportunities for students to learn in, from, with, about, and for their own communities through interactions with community members and local resources.
- create systems for measuring and reporting student progress to parents and other taxpayers.
- find better ways of using time, people, space, and other resources in meeting students' needs.

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- increase use of communications technologies as tools for collecting, organizing, displaying, exchanging and analyzing data in the classroom and in administration.
- create an atmosphere to recruit and support teachers who have a deep understanding of both the subject matter and the learning processes that actively engage students.
- increase the school's resources to help meet its mission of serving students.
- increase student and teacher interactions with community members to develop new school resources and complement existing ones, building the knowledge, skills, tools, and attitudes necessary for student academic success, civic responsibility, and a successful transition into the work force, whether local or somewhere else.

For the Community:

- build new knowledge about the school and its programs.
- build knowledge about the community and its resources.
- gather people from the community with common interests
- increase citizens' on-the-job and civic skills.
- involve citizens in creating a vision for and meeting the goals of a community-based school.
- pool school and community resources to improve community life.
- develop new leadership in the community.

- strengthen the resilience of both the school and the community in times of change.
- create a community of learners for lifelong education, with the school as the focal point.
- give community members a say in strengthening school academic programs by participating in a variety of voluntary, planned initiatives
- form new partnerships among schools, businesses, churches, agencies, and individuals.
- make the school into a player assisting with economic and community development
- increase student and community awareness of and pride in local institutions, resources, traditions, and values.

Creating the Policy Climate

It is important to create a policy climate to help schools become involved in rural economic and community development. Creating this climate depends very much on the realities of local community power structures, which may constrain citizen participation. Given these realities, the notion of a school-community rural development program will not be well-received everywhere, and that is a major difficulty. Many communities do not have a history of democratic discourse that bridges class, racial, and ethnic differences; they are, instead, run by a self-interested elite (cf. Duncan, 1999; Collins, 1995). In many cases, local power brokers co-opt the empowerment process, diverting

programs to their own benefit (Handler, 1996). Unless the patterns of history can be changed, it will be extremely difficult to establish active trust, obligation, and solidarity, along with dialogue and deliberation in communities.

While I empathize with Duncan's (1999) perspective on the difficulties with entrenched local power structures, I am not sure I agree with her suggestion that the federal government can bring about better schools. Rural school resegregation (Kusimo, 1999) is a perfect example of the waxing and waning of federal education efforts over time. The federal government is too far removed to gain local assent to improved schools, given the maxim that "all politics is local." Yet, the federal government does need to play a role in facilitating better schools by setting an overall tone of equality and quality and offering school improvement programs to schools and districts. At the same time, civil rights laws and policies need to be enforced. In addition, federal efforts to develop investment and jobs in impoverished rural areas are useful, especially if they help build diversified, sustainable economies alongside efforts to link schools to community economic development.

Hard as it may be, efforts to improve rural schools and education generally need to be applied to the "reluctant state" that often has shirked its responsibility for quality schools with high standards, equitable funding, accountable governance, and citizen participation (Collins, 1995). States have the constitutional responsibility for education. There has been some

success in this arena, with Kentucky and Texas as two prime examples. Almost every state has reformed its education system since the 1980s, with considerable variability in the nature of that reform.

Kentucky has been particularly vigorous in its reform, after decades of neglecting its schools (Collins, 1995). The reform, passed in 1990, is not perfect, but is working relatively well, compared with before 1990. Its accountability and anti-nepotism provisions, along with a clear focus on school performance and the deep-seated belief that all children can learn, have helped alter local power structures and improved schools in many communities. Grass-roots organizations played an important role in securing passage of Kentucky's school reform legislation and in making sure the state has stayed within the spirit of the reform. Texas is another state with a widespread grass-roots reform effort that has had considerable positive impact on schools and communities (Cortes, 1995; Collins, 1998).

At the local level, schools may offer a starting place for building and rebuilding democratic processes and economic opportunities in rural communities. True, school leaders often perceive themselves as having a limited job description of delivering a standardized curriculum to students; they may not be receptive to innovations (Bhaerman, Grove, and Stevens, 1995). Yet, the post-traditional time in which we live, with its popular vernacular of "thinking outside the box," does indeed offer

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opportunities for school reform, building community, democratic discourse, and alternative forms of employment.

In seeking community reform, Collins (1998) suggests it is important to reach out to principals (or superintendents); they often hold an important key to power in rural communities, and their support is central to bringing about change. Pressure for school change from citizen groups can be successful, but it is easier if school officials are on board with the reform at the outset. Jolly and Deloney (1996) offer suggestions for setting up policies for school-community engagement from the point of view of school officials:

- Staff at rural schools, which may be relatively isolated, need first-hand opportunities to see models at work so they can see how to adapt the models to their own circumstances.
- Staff needs to be convinced that the idea is relevant and compatible with the school's operations, including field testing in similar areas.
- Endorsement by large-scale dissemination is crucial, including empirical support for claims of effectiveness.
- School officials like to hear success stories from a variety of sources.
- There needs to be a network to act as a support group when new programs are being adopted.
- A large percentage of staff must buy into the any innovations, and must have staff development opportunities to buy into the change.

- Constant technical assistance is crucial to carrying out school change. This will help build a school culture of continuous learning and improvement.

Policy Implications

Gardner (1995) suggests several reasons for focusing on schools in community development: First, schools are involved in the common task of educating children for the future, an objective that people can rally around. Second, schools are present in communities and are a common experience for everyone. Third, school can be an important place in instilling a sense of community during children's early years. These propositions have policy implications at the federal, state, and local levels.

At the Federal level:

- While education standards and academic achievement are important, federal education policies should also encourage school organization based on community building, with emphasis not only on school-to-work programs, but also on entrepreneurship and worker- and community-owned enterprises.
- Funds should be made available for development of new rural education programs through Land Grant Universities, in cooperation with colleges of education and regional education laboratories. A regional approach also might be implemented through the four Rural Development Centers. At the local

level, county extension might be engaged in working with schools in different ways than it has in the past.

- Federal policy should continue to urge increased democratic processes in communities by offering programs for technical assistance for strategic planning that link schools and communities.

At the State Level:

- As with the federal government, education policies need to promote high standards and levels of academic achievement, but they also should encourage community building by promoting involvement of parents and other stakeholders in school decision-making.
- Curricula that emphasize place, community, service learning, entrepreneurship, and other forms of business should be encouraged.
- States could help implement strategic planning processes that encourage and reward school and community cooperation. These processes need to be accompanied by technical support and given time to work.
- States might encourage nongovernment organizations to work with state and foundation funds to encourage experimentation in local and school governance to see if there are ways to make communities more inclusive.
- A school-budget line item for school-community liaisons would help schools implement community engagement.

At the Community Level:

- Community leaders need to adopt policies of inclusiveness and coalition building in strategic planning and other matters of governance. This will be a step toward active trust, obligation, and solidarity that will build community support for sustainable change.
- Schools need to be included in community and economic planning. This suggests the need to make local planning more child-centered, in the sense that it considers issues of future generations.
- It should be a policy to include youth in planning discussions and decisions in order to build future leadership.
- Policies should include promoting local businesses to fill market niches, developing civic pride, and cooperation among individuals and organizations in community projects.

At the School Level:

- Schools need to promote high standards of learning and student achievement both individually and collectively. Curricula need to stress both individual and group activities.
- Schools need to help deliver a wide variety of services to the community, including family services; adult education, including technology, health, and social services, and assistance with business start ups.

- Professional development for school staff is important in implementing and sustaining changes.
- Community engagement needs to be a part of everyday life in the school in curriculum, governance, and all other aspects of school operations. In the absence of a state-funded community liaison, schools need to devote resources to hiring a liaison.
- A rural development curriculum that emphasizes rural life possibilities (both positive and negative), but links students to the larger world is important. The curriculum should include service learning, school-based enterprises, and other community activities.
- Students need to be nurtured as individuals, but also need to be taught community obligations.
- Wherever possible, teachers need to be encouraged to live in the community and participate in community activities.
- Schools need to develop closer ties with local government.

Summary

School governance is already changing; some systemic reform efforts try to increase school accountability by demanding meaningful community engagement. Some rural schools are changing their policies and building on their strengths as core community institutions that embrace all facets of community life and empower local residents to have a guiding hand in their future. Thus, accountability to the public for academic performance is only one aspect of schools as a local institution; schools also

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need to become community centers that engage students, parents, and the general public in their operating decisions, services, and programs. Conversely, if rural communities are to survive in a changing global economy and government devolution, localities need to develop policies that use schools as democratizing institutions that train adaptable citizens, workers, and business owners who can sustain community life in an uncertain future.

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Appendix: Excerpts from EZ/EC Document

The Strategic Plan is the cornerstone of the application for Empowerment Zone or Enterprise Community designation. This plan should emerge from a bottom-up process and should be comprehensive in scope. The plan should be bold and innovative -- representing a creative approach to meet the needs of the nominated area in a way that builds on the assets of the area (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 1994:22).

The Federal government is reinventing the way it does business. We realize that all to often, communities have been put in the position of responding to the rigid dictates of various Federal programs and Washington-based planning. This application for Empowerment Zones and Enterprise Communities is different. The tables are being turned. Our goal is to provide you with the flexibility you need to plan more strategically through a community-driven process. All of our Federal agencies are prepared to respond cooperatively to each of you and to your plans for change (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 1994:4).

The Empowerment Zone and Enterprise Community . . . program is a critical element of the Clinton/Gore Administration's community revitalization strategy. This program is the first step in rebuilding communities in America's poverty-stricken inner-cities and rural heartlands. It is designed to empower people and

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communities all across this nation by inspiring Americans to work together to create jobs and opportunity (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 1994:4).

The road to economic prosperity and economic development starts with broad participation by all segments of the community [including government, community, health and social service, environmental and religious groups, the private and nonprofit sectors, and schools]. . . . The residents, themselves, however, are the most important element of revitalization (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 1994:4).